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SUBJECT: Declaration of European Muslims Well-Received in Croatia

Sensitive But Unclassified. Please Handle Accordingly.

¶11. (SBU) Summary and Comment. On 24 February, Bosnian and Herzegovinian Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceric presented in Zagreb a Declaration of European Muslims. Hosted by the Zagreb Islamic Community, the presentation received widespread public attention as a message of tolerance, peace, and moderation. Ceric, author of the Declaration, told the large crowd that he wrote the Declaration for several reasons: to send a message to Muslims to abide by the "social contract" in European society which includes religious tolerance and cooperation; to institutionalize Islam in Europe so that it is not dependent on foreign sources and support; and to further the dialogue between the "East and the West" to build trust, which is at its lowest levels. Ceric also said he was inspired by the 2005 U.S. Senate resolution condemning the events at Srebrenica. Press highlighted the presence of the Ambassador, as did Ceric in his comments, and noted that the U.S. provides a welcoming environment for Muslims.

¶12. (SBU) The Declaration was presented in Zagreb at the request of Croatian Mufti Sevko Omerbasic, who sees Croatia as a model for Europe in that Islam is officially recognized and on an equal footing with other religions, the community is fully integrated yet retains its identity, and issues are resolved systematically. By hosting the presentation of the Declaration and continuing to make public statements of moderation, Omerbasic effectively demonstrated his desire to be a proactive force on this issue. Ceric emphasized the receptiveness not only of Croatia, but its media and its president, who met with Ceric before the presentation. On 23 February, Post hosted U.S. Muslim speaker Stephen Schwartz, who supported Ceric's view that Muslims in the region should assert their moderation and tolerance; he also made a call for leadership: Schwartz asserted that the legacy of Balkan Muslims is one of a strong identity along with moderation and non-violence. As such, he believes that Croatia shares a unique responsibility to lead a dialogue between the Muslim world and "Christian Europe". His message was extensively reported in the local media, as was the Declaration, likely in response to the protests elsewhere over cartoons, which were reprinted in one Croatian weekly. In stark contrast to other areas, both events emphasized the tolerant, integrated, and moderate nature of the Muslim community in Croatia. End Summary and Comment.

Ceric Presents Declaration in Croatia

¶13. (U) Speaking to a gathering including representatives from 28 diplomatic missions, all religious communities and GOC officials, Ceric explained why he wrote the Declaration. "We want to send a message to Europe that we do not want Jihad, but a social contract," he said. "We want Islam to be recognized as a European religion, as it is in Croatia. The Declaration sends a message to Muslims to be good citizens of Europe and to abide by its social norms." It also calls for European acceptance of Islam, of which he remains skeptical. Ceric presented his Declaration for the first time last July in London and later to the European Islamic Forum. Ceric was then invited by Omerbasic to present the Declaration in Zagreb, where the Grand Mufti once served as Imam and still considers himself a part of this

community. Ceric plans to present the document in Washington, D.C. in April. During his speech, Ceric singled out the U.S. as a welcoming environment for Muslims.

**¶14. (U)** The text confirms the non-violent nature of Islam and a desire to implement a program for non-violence to remove the stigma that tie Muslims to global terrorism. The Declaration sends a call to Muslims to promote peace and inter-religious tolerance. It presents Islam as universal rather than tribal or ethnic. Muslims, it says, generally lack a global outlook but carry the stigma of global terrorism. The text refutes collective guilt and recognizes individual responsibility. Europe is depicted as a continent of many faiths with Muslims wanting to be a part of its social, political, and cultural development. While expressing the commitment to the rule of law, tolerance and democratic values, the first chapter also speaks about expectations of political participation, economic development and development of Islamic schools adapted to challenges of European society. Among the expectations is the recognition of Muslim law in matters covered by family law and a relaxed migration policy. It calls for recognition of shariat weddings, allowing headscarves in public, recognition of Islamic holidays and preparation of meals in public institutions in line with their faith. The second chapter stresses that European Muslims should be more concerned with their responsibilities towards society. It lists several imperatives to European Muslims: to read and acquire knowledge, to work hard, to adhere to the common law of family life, to be more proactive in pursuing success and securing their rights and to be oriented towards the future. The third chapter establishes Islam as a universal faith and seeks to develop global awareness that Muslims now lack, starting with a common calendar. Post can send the text of the 24-page document via email if requested.

#### Croatian Mufti Sends Message of Moderation

**¶15. (U)** In recent weeks, Mufti Omerbasic has continued to express his message of tolerance and moderation. Following the protests in BiH against publishing the controversial cartoons, he publicly spoke out against the reaction. "We Muslims in Croatia, the same as our fellow Muslims across the world, raise our voice of protest against those who are offending our highest values such as our emissary Muhammad, but we have to be rational as the learning of Kur'an advises." On numerous occasions, Omerbasic has said that he sees Croatia as a model for Europe in that Islam is officially recognized and on an equal footing with other religions. Croatia is one of four European countries that have officially recognized Islam as a religion, and the country will soon celebrate the 90th anniversary of that acknowledgment. He has said that the Croatian Muslim community, which is indigenous, is fully integrated yet retains a distinct identity, and that issues are resolved systematically with the wider community. Speaking at the Declaration presentation, Omerbasic said that Muslims in Europe need focus on integration into European society rather than to isolate and segregate themselves. The lack of understanding of Islam in Europe further isolates those communities and makes them vulnerable to a more radical Islam. Omerbasic said that the Declaration sends a warning to the European and Muslim public about the difficult position of Muslim in Europe and the problems with the Islamic terrorism, referring particularly to the bombings in Madrid and London. Legal recognition and support of Islam throughout Europe would help Muslims fight against terrorism more proactively and distance themselves from the influence of the Middle East, he believes.

#### Visit of U.S. Muslim Speaker Stephen Schwartz

**¶16. (U)** Post has previously scheduled a 23 February visit of U.S. author and speaker Stephen Schwartz to publicly discuss Islam in the Balkans and Europe. Schwartz, Executive Director of the Center for Islamic Pluralism in Washington D.C., converted to Islam in BiH and has close ties with the Islamic community both there and in Zagreb. The visit received widespread media interest, particularly in light of recent protests in BiH over the cartoons. (Note: As a Croatian weekly had reprinted the cartoons, the protest included the burning of the Croatian flag in Sarajevo. End note.) At a forum organized jointly between the Embassy and the GOC's Human Rights Center, Schwartz said that Croatia and Bosnia have a unique opportunity and responsibility to shape the future of Islam in Europe. Schwartz noted that Croatia and its moderate Muslim community can act as a moderator between "Christian Europe" and the Muslim community, as it has good relations with both. Croatia could initiate a dialogue across borders and prevent the lack

of understanding that has been problematic in the recent past. Musli have proven their moderate character in the Balkans, he added, and the Croatian Muslim community is therefore in a unique position. Schwart believes that Bosnian Muslims enjoy high prestige and unique credibility around the Muslim world because of their experience during the 90s. The community underwent enormous difficulties and did not resort to terrorism, he said. The Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Secretary of the GOC's Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, representatives of various NGOs as well as representatives of the Islamic community and Bosniak minority and attended the forum and participated in the discussion.

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